

Wordeater 129



Wordeater exists as a forum of creative expression for the Joliet Junior College community, including students, alumni, faculty, and staff. It celebrates the diversity of ideas, beliefs, values, language, media, and people of its community. It seeks to promote artistic, personal, and political expression, democratic values, and social justice, including fairness and equal opportunity, rights, and access. Wordeater rejects censorship and attempts to reflect the artistry and lives of its community, while embracing JJC's Core Values of respect, integrity, collaboration, humor and well-being, innovation, and quality.

Wordeater #129 & Fall '13 E-Zine

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Front Cover

The Cycle
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Back Cover

On the Left
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Things I Will Never Do

Dino Green

1. Play Board Games a Second Time

I have like ten. All great condition. I bring them on family trips. I keep them on a shelf in the living room. I look at them every single day. Yet, they've been played once. Family game night. It isn't every Thursday, or every other Saturday, it was one Monday. We played Boggle, Taboo, Apples to Apples, and a few others. It was a fun day. But no matter who is home, what is or isn't on TV, no matter how rainy it is, if we have power or not, those games will never be played a second time. They will sit and collect dust until next Christmas when they will be regifted to a relative so they can have fun for one night.

2. Make my own Anything

I have gone so far as to bookmark recipes online. Sometimes I read the back of a cereal box and think "I can make cocoa puff brownies" but that's where it stops. I can make TV dinners, toast, soup, Spaghetti-O's, well, anything in a can, really. But I don't have the patience to measure ingredients or preheat ovens or taste test anything. It will never happen. It may save me money in the long run, and I may get an opportunity to eat healthier and live longer, but it won't happen.

3. Google It

Your son was mentioned in an online article about cyberbullying? Wow! I have to Google that! But I won't. I will say I will. You will remind me to a thousand times. I could be sitting at the computer, open a tab, type "Google.com" with every intention of inquiring about that, but I will immediately forget why I opened Google and just type "Facebook" - and with every reminder I get of looking up a given topic, it will decrease my interest of actually looking more into it.

4. Walk

I live so close to school, I could walk there. But I won't.

5. Write my Congressman

I wouldn't even know what to say, where to send my letter, or how to address it. I have problems, who doesn't? But my problems are not political. I am out of ketchup, I forgot my math book on a train, I don't know how to tie a tie, I think I need glasses, I called my teacher "mom"... yesterday... I'm 22... he liked it...

6. Call a Relative

I haven't heard from my Aunt Trudy in a while. I'm sure she's not dead. If she was dead/dying, I would hope other relatives would tell me. I get a birthday card from her every year. No money, no lottery ticket, just an empty card with an 'XO' on it - I don't expect gifts at this point, but I don't think a blank card warrants a phone call. I have no major life events going on, so it would be a very boring call where I explain I'm still taking college classes, working at McDonald's, and have no idea what I want to do with my life.

7. Try Harder

I'm a C student - I'm a C guy - I try, sure, but do I go the extra mile? Nope. I have a system. It works. It isn't great. It could be better. But it works for me. I can make promises all day and night that I will try harder and succeed and overcome obstacles that are tossed my way. But I would rather live inside of an obstacle with no windows or doors so I will never know what could have been. And I will be happy. I will be happy because I won't know what real happiness is.

8. Finish a List

Bubonic

Renee Stone

I.

He eludes the plague I am,
Running, soaring above me in a fear-frenzied flight,
Spitting disgust on my hair, face, arms, legs.
My puss-filled fingers latch the ground below,
Face tilted to his jeering calls, reflecting overcast shadows.
My sore eyes water in blurred and blinding sunlight,
My voice, coarse and thick: "Come back!"
But our love's already slit its throat.

II.

He said I hung myself here
On this Coatrack of Complaining,
Doomed to circle the same thoughts
Until I've flipped the red switch on the ceiling.
But he forgot about his hands locked on my throat;
The constant jabs, jokes, mocks
He'd jammed through my fluorescent ears.
How he'd strung me up here for all to see,
Only to pull me down by the ankles
Weeks later like a beaten piñata.
I had thrown my sympathies at his sorrows.
Oh, but my sorrows: they're not worth shit.

III.

I just wanted to be like him.
But I cared too much about what he thought
To let him in.

Iowa

Heather Smith



Wild Spring Iris

Caroline Taylor



It Was Light in July

Jessica L. Kincaid

At first it was light, helium happiness;
Holding the hand of an unlikely lover.
Then I saw glimpses of a life much different,
Which held true in the words he would utter.

I yearned to grow closer to his mind and heart
And learned with each steady beat something new.
Another reason to trust, another reason to fall-
Into the arms of a man just like you.

I've never once heard of someone, searching for my heart,
Who had sent thanks for me to the skies above.
I now know only God could bring me to this,
Only God could foresee such a love.

Though the waters weren't calm, my rowing arms were weak,
Each day brought a less threatening tide.
The words that you'd speak and the way that you'd hold me-
Left a longing for you by my side.

With these words perhaps I'll calm your nerves
As you have countless times for me.
Remember that our path is laid out from above,
And ultimately "what will be, will be."

Life is frighteningly uncertain as we all surely know.
Its valleys are filled with struggles, it's true.
But honestly I'm sure, I could triumph it all,
Holding a shield of faith and a lover like you.

Medicine Hands

Kevin Sterne

It was the day after kindergarten ended. Ben sat on the edge of his sandbox and packed small clumps of sand onto a foot-high mound. He dug his fingernails deep into the moist sand and packed baseball-sized scoops into what was shaping into a fort for his army men.

When the fort was completed he positioned each of his men according to their individual skills. The snipers looked out from the top of the fort at the minesweepers that combed the edges, where the sand met the wood and the box ended. The ones with bazookas were his favorite. He found them in the woods across the street after the Springtime rain water had receded. He dug them out of the ground with mostly his fingernails.

A spider crept along the board that hung on the side of the sandbox. Its torso was brown, darker than the section of wood it paused on. It looked like a heavy circle of stain and Ben didn't notice it until it twitched. His body shook. Toby barked from the patio across the yard. Mom sat in her chair sipping iced tea and reading a book. Emma played with her chalk. He was alone. He reached for a stick behind him and swatted at the spider until it became a blotch on the wood.

Ben stared at the dead spider for a moment and then used the stick to scrape it away from the sandbox. Then he looked around for more spiders. There was bound to be more and he didn't fully trust his men to defend him against invaders.

While he was searching for enemies, Emma snuck across the yard and sat opposite him in the sandbox.

"Go away."

"Why can't I play?"

It was *his* sandbox, not Emma's. He corralled all of his men to his side of the box.

"I want some guys."

"Mom, Emma's annoying me."

Mom didn't look up.

"You can share," she called.

Emma remained.

"I don't have time for this shit," he said as he threw one of the parachute men into the corner by Emma. He had heard Dad say it in the shed a couple of times.

He got up and walked across the backyard towards the house.

"Mom, Ben said a bad word."

"No I didn't." He was right under the big tree now, halfway to the patio.

He saw Toby lying in the shadow of Mom's chair. A few feet away were Emma's fresh chalk drawings. A flower like the one in

Mom's garden occupied an entire cement square. Why did she have to copy everyone? He dragged his heel through the middle of the flower and then side-to-side. The bunny was next. It was yellow.

Emma screamed. Then she began to cry. Mom scraped her chair across the cement and slammed her book on the table.

That night it rained. Ben's bed was flush with the window and he sat listening to the rain pelt the roof and slosh in the gutter that hung a few feet above. He pressed his finger to the cold pane and followed the raindrops that slipped down the glass. Big drops started at the top, fell down, and absorbed smaller drops until they disappeared at the bottom of the window. Tomorrow the sand would be moist, perfect for building.

He always slept closest to the window, closest to the thunder that sounded over the gentle rain. Toby shook at the end of his bed and Ben opened his eyes. Moments later there was the soft shuffling of Emma dragging her blanket into his room.

"Can I sleep with you?"

Ben pretended to be asleep hoping she would leave, but she climbed up onto the bunk bed above him. Ben flung his covers off him and got up.

The day after Emma got her cast Mom took Ben to the Doctor's. They met Dad there after work.

"Do you know why Emma has a cast Ben?" the Doctor asked.

"Because she fell off the top bunk."

He liked when adults asked him questions but he didn't want to be asked about Emma's arm anymore. It was all he heard Mom talk about on the phone.

Ben examined the Doctor's fish tank while the adults talked quietly. There was a diver at the bottom of the fish tank. He thought of one of his army men. He knew they would float in the water because Dad said they were hallowed.

"Do you like fish, Ben?" the Doctor asked.

He imagined swimming under water at his Grandma's. The water always got in his nose and made it sting. But this time it didn't. He opened his eyes. There was a diver sitting at the bottom of the deep end. Ben swam to it but when he reached over to touch it he saw the pool cleaning scuttling along the floor. He shook. The tentacles wiggled like spider legs. There were eight of them. Soon the diver disappeared.

"So he can play nice," Mom said to Emma as she placed an orange and black capsule in Ben's palm and then a cup of juice in his other hand. He swallowed the pill and then opened his mouth for Mom to inspect. She didn't even have to ask anymore.

The sun was closer to the backyard than at any time of the year. Emma and Toby ran through the sprinkler. Mom had rolled

plastic wrap over Emma's yellow cast and water droplets reflected and blinded Ben as he tried to watch from behind the sliding glass door. He returned to his Legos.

Ben pieced a few sections of his bricks together, carefully inspecting the picture instructions before acting on each step. He was building a Star Wars Tie-Fighter that Dad had bought him. He had carefully opened the box to preserve the picture with all of the accompanying sets on the back. Ben wanted all of them. There were clear plastic bags with many pieces that he wouldn't open until he reached those parts in the instructions. When he was finished he would arrange the Tie-Fighter in accordance to the action picture on the box and then place it in the corner of his room or on his dresser, sometimes taking it down to play with. Mostly, he let it sit up there. Lego figures slowly collected in Ben's room.

"Ben, honey, let's get up."

He had spent most of the night tossing in his bed. Sleep had come in bursts and when his eyes were not closed they were looking up at the bottom of the bunk bed. He had watched Emma fall off his top bunk at least a hundred times and each time he would kick his legs and flip himself over to a cool spot on the bed. This is how most of his nights were since he started the pills.

"Two more minutes," he said into his pillow.

"It's already after nine."

He flung his body around and looked at his mom.

"Emma's not even up."

"The Doctor said you need a routine Ben."

"The Doctor's an idiot"

"That's enough. Come on. Chop-chop."

Ben's Legos were now in the basement. He had dismantled the Star Wars sets and constructed a spiraling opus that reached up to his shoulders. An intricate race car track weaved through the tower and stretched around much of the basement. He walked down the stairs and dipped under his race track and sat in his workspace. This was his routine.

He had never worn glasses. Mom said his eyes were fine. Still, the medicine always made him see better. The whole basement came into focus. The walls were not just gray. They were cement. The carpet was made of tiny little threads. The individual Lego pieces became brighter and he suddenly knew which ones he needed for his tower. The burp of the pump was the loudest sound in the whole basement. Ben worked in silence, mostly.

The stairs rattled as Toby jumped down the last five steps and landed on the cold cement with flailing paws. He just had a bath. Toby leapt over the racetrack and shot right under Ben's legs, narrowly missing the base of the Lego tower. He sniffed the floor and then up and down Ben's shirt. Ben could smell Emma's baby shampoo on Toby.

"Go away."

Toby barked and threw his paws up on Ben, who immediately knocked them away. The tower fell to the floor. Toby let out a long yelp and scrambled back up the stairs. Ben sighed and began to pick up the fallen pieces. It would not be hard to rebuild.

September had not yet come but Ben was already busy with a Christmas list. He sat, legs crossed on his bed, eagerly flipping the many pages of a toy magazine. The wind rustled through the trees outside his window and a crack of thunder made Toby jump off the bed, but Ben hardly noticed. He was circling a toy or Lego set on nearly every page.

The rain began to fall and Toby whined at the door. He wanted out.

"Toby, stop it," Ben said just as his Dad opened the door.

"Ben, bed."

He circled more things while dad picked clothes off the floor and put them into drawers.

"Up or down," Dad asked, his hand on the string of the blinds. The rattling of the gutter outside the window was loud; the rain was falling hard now. Ben crawled under his covers and turned his lamp off. He looked at the rain softly hitting his window.

"Down."

Saturday was the last time Dad would need to cut the grass that year. Ben, Emma, and Dad had just finished eating cereal. Mom had left a note, which Dad read aloud.

"We're out of juice but Ben still needs to take his medicine."

He placed the black and orange capsule on the table.

"I need my juice."

"Just swallow it like a big boy. Swallow."

He tried but the pill kept sticking to his tongue. He wanted to chew it but remembered that his Mom had told him not to. Ben could feel the pill collapsing and the beads spilling out. The capsule was melting. The beads tasted like chalk.

"Just spit it out then."

He did, into his hand, and then rinsed it off in the sink.

"But Mom says I'm supposed to take it."

"One day won't kill you."

He looked out the backyard. It had been a long time since he had played in the sandbox.

Much of the sand was wet, perfect for building mountains for Ben's army men. He carved bunkers with his fingers and placed sticks in the sand to mark the perimeter of the base. Then he positioned his men according to their skills. The ones with bazookas were his favorite. He hummed softly as he pushed the jeep over the sand hills. Dad's lawn mower was close to the patio where Emma sat with her chalk.

Ben looked down at his sand mountain. Something on top of

it twitched. His body shook. He reached for a stick behind him and then swatted at the insect. It was a Monarch Butterfly. Ben recognized it from the pictures at kindergarten. He had crumpled one of the spotted wings; the stick lay abandoned at the edge of the sand box.

Ben's hand shook. He tried to straighten the collapsed wing, but it was thin and stuck to his fingers. The wing was melting and when he tried to scoop up the butterfly, the spotted orange wing tore from the black body. There was no going back. He looked up. Emma was sitting opposite him, watching. He reached across the sand and hugged her.

Storm clouds made their way over the backyard. Ben knew raindrops were coming. Tomorrow he would start first grade.



Drifting

Kayla Miller

Nerves

Brendon Kolodziej

I spent all last week inside of my head;

If it wasn't for me then I'd be dead.

My nerves, my nerves, the herbs...

I'm a wreck. Shaking and twitching and stuttering,

No control, total control.

Every time I drive my car down a lonely road

Free Bird is playing like a scene in a fucking movie, groovy.

Observing is what I do best.

Description is not my strong point.

But observation is true preservation.

No immunity without community.

I'm a ticket seller, sitting here in a booth all day.

Stuck like a tooth in a cob of corn;

Your first loose tooth, your fight to be born.

How did I win that fight?

It must have been luck. Damn luck.

I'm no fighter; I'm more of an oyster.

I can't describe it, you'll just have to observe.

Take some time, pinch a nerve.

Paint my skin your favorite colors.

On a day like today who could ask for anything more

Than the fog on the glass

And the heat in the air

That wraps itself around everything and everyone...

Holding it close.

I think I've had enough.

Turn on a fan and shoot the scene into the future,

It's no better.

Finger nails and floor boards,

Florescent lighting and mercury soaked bed sheets.

Everything she finds; everyone she meets.

Cold isolation followed by a knock at the door,

The fear of what's to come

And the fear of what has come before.

Cage

Renee Stone



Continuation

Christiena Ogalla

I had a dress, a beautiful dress, the weight of coffee in my hand, hot and fresh, I let it spill, I found my rock, repose burns in, burns out, the falling leaves, I smiled at them in their spiral down, they crunched beneath my feet, laced and ready to conquer, an animal, shelled and useless, disposable, trek onward, breathing in, breathing out, no denying fallibility, loves me, loves me not, they attacked, the thoughts, in unconquerable formation, a game, a child's shiny toy, I unwrapped the thought, where is the return receipt, misplaced, an acknowledgment, glazed over eyes, unwilling to notice, amen and so forth, I turned back, and back again, indecisive, and thirsty, what am I thirsty for, coffee, hot and dark and fresh, I had some coffee but I let it tip, I did it on purpose, to race, to run, I did a glorious thing, and autumn she called, condensation on city windows, the unbending fingers, their accusations, tracing words in the shallow creek, please come trace shallow words with me in the creek, pardon, trace words in the shallow creek, don't indulge, maybe try another rank, the radio waves they are weaker here, thrive in it, is that what you want from me, to succeed, is that how you decide that you value me, how do you value me, I digress, and digress again, my beautiful dress, did you see it, I was shining, I stood upon North Dakota and I saw the world, how are you, how are you, how are you, I don't know, perhaps another day, nausea she kicked, and I kicked back, there's a bruise and a treasure map, for proof, there are too many words, Jacob's ladder is in knots, I tried to untie it, the ropes they are thick, Jack and Jill they had the hill, I sold it for the lesser, forgive me, I climbed the tree, it gave to me, crisp linen sheets, enfold not protect, what did I need, excuse me, I let the hope melt into the chocolate, the mirror it lied on purpose, a deep well, a blossoming flower, oozes nectar, here comes the swarm, building the fortress, brick by brick, lay it out, cement it, in a thousand years feel good, does it come with an insurance policy, words, words, precious words, mean something, mind ramblings they want of escape... I had this dress, this beautiful dress, should that make me beautiful as well, please define the beauty and spoon-feed it to the child, it's nutritional, believe me yes, and rock them gently to your beliefs, they'll come around one day, and then you will smile at yourself, but where is my dress, my beautiful dress?

Inner Beauty

Alexandria Miller

Skinny legs, bigger breasts are all they want to see.
Tiny waists and thinner arms, the opposite of me.
The pressure to be perfect is slowly closing in,
An utter suffocation that doesn't seem to end.
Society is telling me, beautiful is thin,
And if I choose to starve myself perfection is what I win.
Shoving something down my throat, will get me what I want.
Bring me closer to that goal, of a body I can flaunt.
Society is telling us, beauty is a prize,
Measured in the size of your breasts, in weight and clothing size.
But let me tell you here and now, no good will come of that.
It seems okay at first, but soon becomes a trap.
A disease that clouds the mind, and believes what is untrue,
Believes you're never good enough, no matter what you do.
There is only one beauty that I know, it's the greatest prize of all.
It's learning to accept yourself,
Imperfections,
Flaws,
And all.

Evolution

Leonardo Mireles



Daisy

Kevin Sterne

Lift. Swing. Chop.

The oak logs would crack with the first strike of the axe, and break with the second- so long as my form was tight. Wood tumbled off the stump and lay scattered about the black, rooted dirt until I collected it with my calloused hands, which were cut-up and bloody because we could not afford gloves.

I stacked the cut wood in neat rows, flush with the brick of our small three-room house. Flush so no strays found shelter. Tight because if it were shit Pop would make me tear it all down and start again. He stood there, mouth full of tobacco, watching as I set log after log on the stump.

Lift. Swing. Chop.

"I learned at a young age, probably younger than you, the importance of doing a job right the first time. Every job. Even something small. Know why?"

I wiped my flannel sleeve over my forehead and looked up at him. His shoulders sagged and his back curved like a beaten rug.

"If it's a small job and you do it like shit it will turn into a big one. Understand?"

Pop and I were chicken farmers with twenty hens whose eggs we sold up at the Sunday market to men with their families. Pop's eggs were quite popular, which, naturally, made Pop quite popular. Men were dressed in slacks and women in church dresses. All were alive with the word of the Lord except Pop and me. I watched as they'd file out of church and walk past each of the small tables filled with the hard work of the local growers: cabbage, tomatoes, and various legumes. The butcher came on the first and third of the month, but Pop said he preferred the hunting of venison to chops or beef cuts. I knew we could not afford to buy meat anyways.

We had our regular customers: Mr. Corvallis, the Pratts, and the Smithes. Pop greeted each and every passer-by with a "good morning" and a tight-lipped smile. These were the only days he bothered with the razor. Lack of practice often left his face scraped or cut but his demeanor never changed, even when stretches of folks were not interested in the eggs. He smiled and thanked everyone for his or her time.

A boy my age kissed his father on the cheek. The man had just bought him a wooden train from the table down the way. I figured if I became good with a knife I could carve one like it. Pop rustled my hair with his leathery hand and gave me a nickel. This was

the first time I had ever been given money. I felt its weight in my hand and rubbed it gently with my fingers. The possibilities: hard licorice, gumdrops, flavored ice? No, I needed something more useful, maybe a new knife or a good handkerchief. Both were great options but I never decided on one. Pop took back the nickel right before we packed up.

"Unless you want to buy some eggs," he asked.

He knew I hated the taste of eggs and did not say anything else after that. Dusk was falling and we were the only ones left. We were always the last ones to leave.

I read once that you can count the seconds between lightening and thunder to figure out how far away a storm is. That night both happened at the same time. The whole house shook. Pop flung my door open and threw my boots on the floor.

"Barn's on fire."

Rain was falling in buckets and I was soaked to the bone before I had even reached the barn, which was a blaze like a big burning log. I just stood there for a few moments and watched the fire spread over the cupola. The rain was doing little to stifle it and the wind made it move faster. Pop was trying to drag the wagon out but I quickly determined that it was pointless for him to keep struggling. Part of the loft had collapsed onto the wagon trapping Muriel, our mule, inside. I knew she would not be saved. I think Pop knew too because after a while he stopped trying. By then, though, I had already gone inside to watch the barn burn from my bed.

The next morning we buried Muriel at the edge of the woods and then took a walk to see what trees the storm had knocked down. After we rebuilt the barn I figured Pop would have me chop these trees into useable logs. Firewood was a precious commodity in the winters and always seemed to be just enough to help us get by when the eggs ran low. Pop would need to buy another mule to replace Muriel and I knew he was thinking about this as we walked through the mud. Light rain was still falling when we reached the clearing where the land sloped down into the valley. This is where Pop's property line was. I stood at the edge and looked out at the new mills that were going up. I had come here many times to watch the slow rise of the metal walls but this was the first time Pop had been here since it all started.

I knew that he hated the mills. He had talked about the railroads before and how they cut through folks' land. How the trains were too big and noisy. How they would bring out people from the big cities in the east. This is what scared Pop the most. I thought of a story a man at the market had told us a few weeks earlier. He said a black man out east had raced against this

machine to dig a tunnel through the side of some mountain. Said a lot of folks came to watch and exchanged bets. The man won but died right after.

"Damn boy worked himself to death," the man said.

"At least he won," Pop replied. I wondered what he would have said if the black man had lost.

We stared out at the valley for a long time. I could almost hear the hammers rattling down below.

Lift. Swing. Chop. Lift. Swing. Chop. It did not rain for several months after that.

At the beginning of summer, about early June, we had two callers to our property: a man who looked a little younger than Pop and a girl about my age. He wore pressed slacks and a white cotton shirt. I could tell his boots had not seen much wear from the way he walked in them. He introduced himself to Pop and me as Thomas E. Cressman. She had bright red hair down the small of her back and deep blue eyes that were too pretty to look at. She had sun-kissed skin and freckles on her face. Her fingers played with her dress made of lace. She was nervous and I noticed. Her name was Daisy.

"What can I do for you Mr. Cressman?"

"Please, call me Tom. I understand that this is a chicken farm. You and your son farm chickens?"

"Layers."

"Pardon?"

"We're hen layers. We take the eggs when they been laid."

"I see. Well I wonder if you would be interested in selling some of your hens. Excuse my frankness."

"For what?" Pop eyed him up and down. "We ain't interested in competition Mr. Cressman."

"No, I'm sorry. I should have explained. I fancy chickens would make great pets."

Neither of us knew what to make of this statement.

"I reckon a dog would make a better pet. More useful."

"My little girl's allergies act up to most breeds."

"I ain't parting with my hens. Not for anyone."

"Then perhaps you would consider selling this farm."

I could only imagine what Pop and that Mr. Cressman discussed after I left. Mr. Cressman suggested that I show Daisy the hens.

"Could I feel them?"

Her voice was as sweet and gentle as the way she mothered Grace in her arms. Pop thought it stupid to apply names to the New Hampshire Reds.

"Don't turn soft on me. Everything dies."

Maybe he was right.

She told me her mother had died the year before. She told me they had just bought the property down the road, how her father thought a quiet life was best, and how all she really wanted was a friend.

I had never felt happier than I had been earlier that day. I had looked into her eyes and she into mine and, for a second, everything was perfect. I no longer hated chopping wood. I did not love books or the rain. The taste of eggs did not bother me. None of it mattered. I was there in the backyard and she was with me and life was perfect. I decided that I needed to feel like that again. I needed to see her again.

I heard the screen door slam as I was pulling on my boots. Pop had shaken me awake and said that he had found a fox in the back yard. We were both used to finding an occasional fox but there was still urgency in his voice. It was well after midnight and he probably had not fallen asleep yet. I did not bother tying my bootlaces because I figured he would just fire a few shots into the woods to scare them off and I could go back to bed. A shell or two usually got rid of them. My job was to check on the hens. Some hens had been known to start brooding after a fox scare.

The floorboards creaked as I got my maroon pullover from the dresser. All was calm in the house otherwise. I thought of falling into my bed. I had been having a good dream—a happy dream. I wondered, even, if I had been smiling when Pop came in. It did not make a difference if I was or was not, though, and I let it go.

The shotgun was resting in the corner by the door. Maybe it was finally my turn to fire shots into the woods. I grabbed it and our lantern and quietly closed the screen door.

All was still in the backyard and Pop was nowhere to be found. I held the gun up in front of me and made my way to the hen house. It was silent. The eight white Leghorns and twelve Hampshire Reds were sleeping. I closed and latched the door. That is when I found Pop.

He was sweating and his hands were stained with blood. His flannel was also wet but I could not tell if this was from sweat or from the same stuff on his hands. He was smiling. His eyes were glossed with a shade of navy. They were no longer black like his matted hair.

“Come here.”

I followed the tufts of fur to the base of the hen house where dirt and blood had collected in thick clumps. There would be no need for the gun tonight. I felt it slip from my hand.

Pop’s lantern lay a few feet away and allowed just enough light as he tore the hide from the skeleton. Each rip cast shadows onto the side of the hen house. That is how I noticed the small scarlet

beads dripping down the boards. Pop had tacked the head up where the two halves of the roof met. The glossy blue eyes stared at me. I had never seen Pop smile that way.

Lift. Swing. Chop.

Logs were stacked four rows deep along the house. It had not rained all summer and folks were concerned for their crops. Some thought it was the worst draught in over a hundred years. Pop figured it was bad for business. He said that as the wells dried so too would folks' pocket books.

"I've never known anyone to profit from a draught," he said as we watched the men and women walk passed.

Daisy and her father came up to our table and invited Pop and me to supper. Pop declined because we had to stay until the market closed.

"Maybe your boy would like to come?"

"My boy has a job to finish Mr. Cressman."

Pop sighed and looked down at me.

"If you want to go you can go."

I knew it would be foolish to leave but I wanted to take Pop by his word. I left with Daisy and her father.

Their house was much bigger than ours. There was no barn and the yard looked smaller, but a swing dangled from the oak branch in the front. I liked this. I had never been on one before but I thought it looked nice even if it did not need to serve a purpose. Mr. Cressman sat across from me and smiled as we ate.

"There will be work down at the mill once it's finished. It might be good for a boy your age. Earn a decent living."

I stared at my plate: mashed potatoes, beans and bread, a cut of beef with gravy. It was the best supper I had ever had.

I knew Mr. Cressman had something to do with the mills going up in the valley but I did not know what. Daisy said he was down there most days and that she was often left at home. She told me to visit. She told me to take her on an adventure. I wanted to. I wanted to run away with her. I knew spots in the forest we could go and never be found. There were small winding paths along the trunks of trees that no one except me had seen. There were openings too, with knee-high grasses where we could lay and I could make animals of the clouds. I could compare her face to flowers while she whispered into my ear. Pop thought it foolish to waste a day this way.

I walked home by myself. Mr. Cressman offered to take me in his wagon but I insisted on going alone. It was only a mile or two until the bridge and then I could cut through one of my paths in the woods. There was a breeze and I enjoyed a quiet walk. This also gave me an excuse to see Daisy again since I would have to

return the lantern.

The night was very still except for the quiet swaying of the branches. The moon was bright and the road was well lit. There were few bugs these days because of the drought, but I swatted a mosquito as I neared the bridge. I was at least a hundred feet away but I saw part of it had collapsed. I walked to the edge and held out the lantern. Twenty feet below was shattered pieces of the bridge and our wagon. I shimmied down the ravine to the dried up riverbed.

Pop lay pinned under part of the cart. He was still breathing but his hair was thick with blood. I wrapped my shirt around his head. He was muttering something but was too weak to form words. The wagon was too heavy to lift off his chest but I kept lifting until I was drenched with sweat. I tried using one of the broken boards as a lever but soon dropped to the ground panting. My chest heaved. I could not leave Pop like this. He kept muttering. I crawled over and held his head in my hands. His eyes were glossed with a shade of navy.

"Axe."

I willed my way back up to the road and ran to the house. I grabbed the axe from the barn and sprinted back through the woods. I had left the lantern with Pop but the moon was bright and I could see well.

Down the ravine I tumbled, scraping my back and shoulder. Blood was seeping through the shirt and he had stopped muttering.

Lift. Swing. Chop.

The wagon would break and I would pull him out.

Lift. Swing. Chop.

I would carry him up the ravine to the house.

Lift. Swing. Chop.

I told myself he was not that hurt. That it would be fine.

Lift.

Everything was going to be all right.

Swing.

I started to cry.

Chop.

A small fox stood by the lantern and its shadow fell over Pop. It looked young—too young to be on its own.

Stay

Jessica L. Kincaid

It's Friday night and all I want to do is hear from you,
As I cling to memories of your eyes flashing in sync with the light,
dark, light, dark of our favorite movie.

It's Friday night and all I want to do is hear from you,
As I summon the sound of your concern left in a voicemail while I
sat in class.

It's Friday night and all I want to do is hear from you,
Because you left me holding on to the edge, terrified of letting go.
It's Friday night and all I want to do is hear from you,
And it's your duty to pull me up and kiss the grip calluses you've
left upon my palms.

It's Friday night and all I want to do is hear from you—
So please, call.

True Love

Lindsey Cantrell



Train of Thought

Linda Joanne

As I step from the train platform and conform to the Z of the seat, I wonder how magical it must have been for the very first youngster to do the same. Step, sit, zip off without effort in total awe of the landscape being quickly pulled out of sight!

Mr. Starnicky's aftershave whips past my nose each time the train comes to a stop and the doors open and shut for passengers. The man in front of me, about my age now, would think me a forward woman asking what line of cologne his scent is. I do not inquire. I do not wish to interrupt the screen shots of memories clicking by. I was in seventh grade, Starnicky was my homeroom teacher, tall, blond, solid but slim. My nipples had just popped that year. Two supple sunny-side up eggs on my breast plate of white. He was so clean and fresh as an Irish Spring morning. His smile and fair skin welcomed questions about trade winds and names of clouds. My desk was in missionary position to his, the black board framing the explanation of nature's whims.

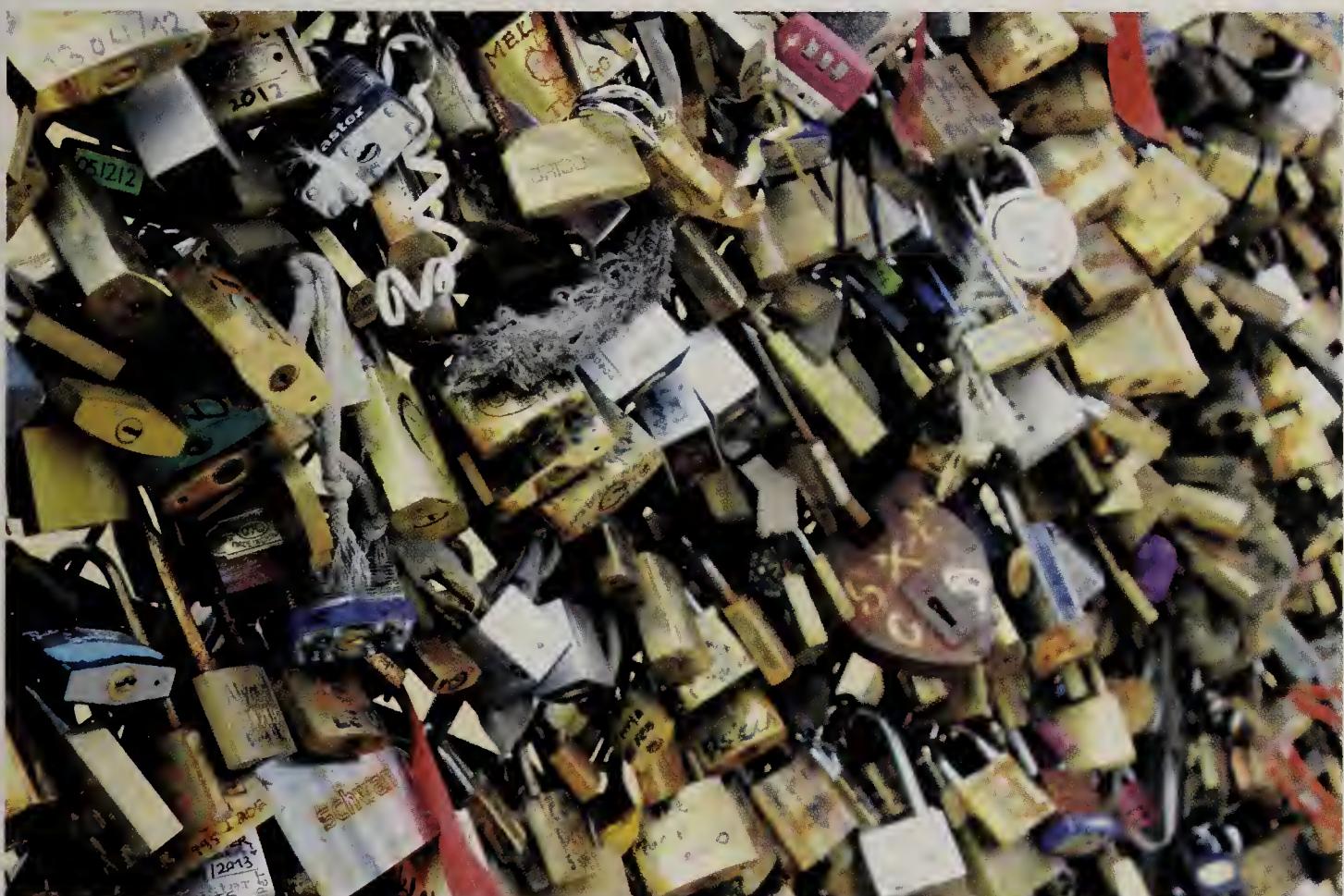
As a pubescent I might have been raised by wolves. My sexual orientation had no references beyond the blush shared between Ginger Rogers and Fred Estair. Our Victorian home had two mirrors, both restricted the snapshot to a headshot. The same space as our Philco television box. The night of my teenage honeymoon I feared being seen below the neck. Perhaps subconsciously not expecting to really exist outside of the small world I saw as a child. My person was within the lines of the magic viewfinder where I live in the world of Ginger, Fred, Dorothy, and with the lines of Jimmy Stewart: "I'm not going to settle down. I'm going to travel the world ... and" then he drops the phone and surrenders: "Oh, Mary! Mary! Mary!"

My train swishes to a stop. I joyously run down the Van Buren station stairs. Beneath Michigan Avenue is an acoustic tunnel. A flutist fills the empty space in front of the legions of workers with tones of gentle chimes. A professional appearance perhaps from Tokyo. I don't usually but I must now exchange thanks for his gift. He grins and bows. I reflect and then run to stay ahead of the herd. Coming out of the labyrinth the sirens, motors, squealing CTA train car wheels overhead are all white noise when I'm in the city. My senses nestle in the Loop. When my feet flounder in the burbs all noise jabs at my hearing as if I'm under attack from Hitchcock's birds. The palm to a horn is inexcusable there, where here it punctuates the cross walks. Cutting in line is unforgivable.

Nasty voices - lessons to a child - punishable. Plots of earth just have different rules.

During my exile among the farmland and circles of subdivisions, my road home after work in the winter would clip past a particular marker of wild prairie, and my eyes would always jerk up to the rearview mirror to search for the figure I'd swear was standing just off the turn of road. In mentioning this years later to a farmer who sold the plot of earth, he hung his head in sorrow of the story he knew. A defiant chief stood over his village where they were massacred. I dared not mention the headdress on the figure.

I turn, looking for the tracks homeward.



Secrets

Lindsey Cantrell

Word Bruises

Elizabeth Chatman

I don't want your bread and butter conversations.
Give me words of dough,
something still changing, shaping,
let me offer my thumbprint.
Screw the small talk,
my ears burn of the weather.
Speak something meaningful.
Quit disgracing the alphabet,
stop belittling our language.
Words offer boundless expression,
allow us to voice unlimited and unrestricted thoughts,
free flowing and unabridged,
disentangled from the everyday drone.
Yet we delicately tiptoe on the surface,
exchanging short mutters regarding the common monotony.
It's a roomful of careful, caged lips,
whispering about colorless routine and humdrum events.
I ache for the eager voice,
the one that stumbles over excited words,
mind running faster than mouth,
the one that sparks ideas that travel like veins of lightning,
untamed and contagious.
Throw me words like punches,
give me an uncomfortable bruise that stays a few days,
leaving my lying awake,
eyes wide in the dark,
mind racing and stirring.
I crave those brilliant syllables and phrases on fire.
So I invite you to come with minds teeming,
lungs burdened,
and tongues poised.

Uncharted World

Christopher Idrovo

- He lives in a battlefield, hatred is revealed, guns are concealed, there's no shield
- Bullets unload in his direction, there's no protection, it's a world of natural selection
- His dad's in jail, his family can't pay bail, and can only communicate with him by mail
- His best friend just died, everyone cried, he asks himself what does it take to survive?
- Mom can't take the pain, so she relies on cocaine, and life's going down the drain
- He's got nothing to eat, he's met defeat in these Chicago streets
- He just wants to succeed, even if he has to bleed, he wants to be free
- School is secondary, survival is first, he doesn't want to end up in a hearse
- He falls asleep to the sound of gunshots and sirens, there is no silence
- This is the world where thieves rob and kill old men, time and time again
- Young moms don't care for their child, or their lifestyle, nothing's worthwhile
- Drug dealers lurk the block, with their glock, all around the clock
- The kids have no chance, if you'd take first glance, you'd call it a nightmare
- The poor kids call it home, a war zone, and most of them are all alone

Heart in Peace

Stephanie Ly

When my heart falls I want to stab it in place–
Stop the movement–
Cease the beating,
Pin it to the corkboard,
To my backbone.
Blood dripping,
Faint movement apparent only if you knew it was beating

When my heart pumps wildly I want to plunge it with a knife
Quell the pulsating
Still the shivering,
Hide it in the tree burrow

A seven inch, double-edged blade
With a handle too big for my grip
The tip would curl inward,
It would be a hunting knife
Meant to gut prey,
Meant for survival
“Oh, how poetic”
They would say
“How terribly sad”

I imagine myself cracking my chest plate to break the steel
through into the copper
I imagine myself not being able to slice deeper than an inch,
Having to finish myself off by a drop,
Falling
Onto
Myself

Slapping the palm of any random human–
With a dollar bill, of course–
Asking politely, “will you cease the beating of my heart?”
The stranger would answer with only an expression
once I revealed the blade
Maybe if I had ammunition, they would be able to
go through with it–

To be able to be feet away,
Instead of inches.
To not be able to see the life escape my eyes,
The final breath exiting my lungs,
My cells,
My mouth,
Nose and eyes.
The color leaving my skin,
Creating new, abnormal human colors
The contortion of my features as pain rips through
My heart pumping until there's no more fluid left to go through
the lines
Having expelled from the hole in my chest
If it were impersonal, Strange Human might be more inclined.

Yet here I lay,
Here I breathe,
Here is my heart,
Unable to quell the pump,
Curdle the blood,
Slow the beat,
Close my eyes,
And rest

I imagine that when I leave through the door for the day I am able to extract my heart.
Press my fingertips through my breast
And feel myself
The warmth of my muscle,
The gentle hum it radiates,
How sopping it felt from within;
Being able to hold it with my hand
And yank it from my chest.

I would have a specific platter for my heart to rest for the day,
It would be silver, of course,
It would have an elongated glass case above, able to be gawked at
Being able to remove easily by the stem atop
It would sit silently above the mantle,
On the kitchen table,
Maybe even a special pillar created.
It would be veiled, unable to see directly from afar,

No, you must walk up to it in bewilderment unknowing what you will find masked.

When unconcealed—the jaw falls,
Unable to believe what has been beneath cloth the entire time
Nobody dares to remove the glass,
Maybe if done so, the heart will cease to beat
Maybe it will jump at you.

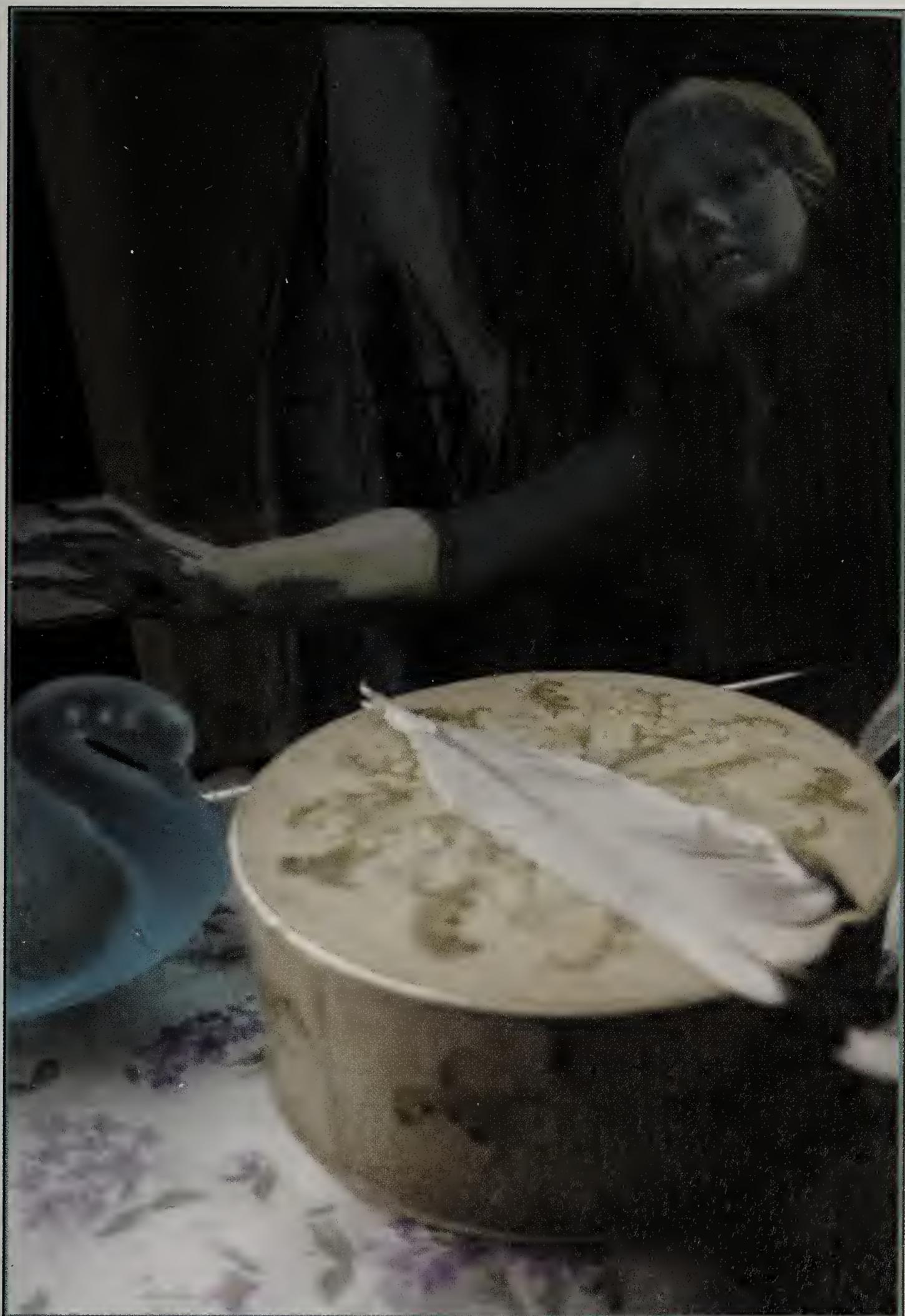
Leave it alone,
Inquiries later,
Much later,
When the questions have been simmering,
And readying to boil,
The heat is turned up unbeknownst to any human around,
The brain overflows and pours through the mouth
Pours through the fingertips.
And
It is never calm,

From the other room you realize you forgot to turn the heat down
so you're running in a frenzy to the boil,
You yank the heat down to zero
Simultaneously grabbing the pot off of the stove,
The water stops to froth and begins to still,
The sizzle below hasn't ceased,
And there's still a mess upon the stove.
You're content having ceased the heat.
Wiping up the mess isn't difficult,
Yet it something you could have done without
You scald yourself with inner thoughts.

When I got home at the end of the day I would unveil the glass,
Clasp the stem and knob at the top with one hand,
And with the other I would grasp my heart and reenter the muscle
I would reattach the veins, the arteries, the capillaries,
I would become a human alone,
I would have a heart alone,
I would be able to sleep content,
The beat would be slow,
Unjagged,
Normal.

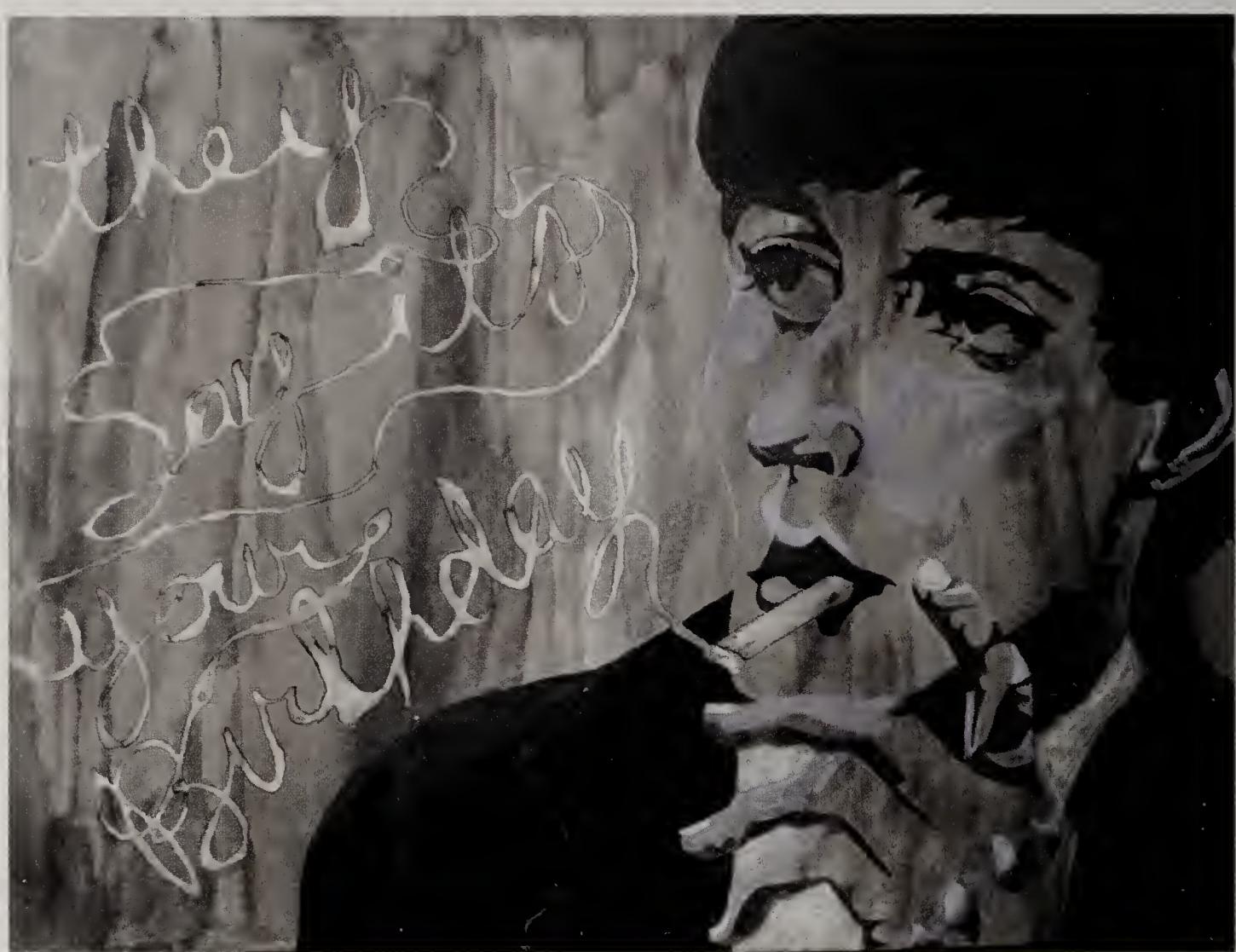
Reclaiming Her Rights

Linda Steger



They Say It's Your Birthday

Heather Smith



Heroes

Daniel Kloc

Only follow the ones you were told were bad news.

The ones they whispered about.

They hide from us our heroes while we are blinded by the scorching light of speeches and consumerism and foundations.

Seek out the heroes. The ones who wear the They Live! sunglasses.

The only difference between a prophet and a vagrant is an audience.

Tell me only of the world once you've seen it firsthand.

Superman cannot speak the truth to me.

Roy Batty can.

And so they label him and those like him "outcasts," "crazies," and "misfits."

But they are out there.

Behind every dark corner. In every alleyway. Hiding in the cobwebs.

Waiting to open the eyes of the blinded.

And the truth shall set you free.

The Tale of Madame Crow

Cody Marcukaitis

Madame Crow has no arms
and wears a stuffed crow on her head.
Where her once gorgeous face was
there are wrinkles instead.
A string of pearls 'round her neck
opal earrings on her ears
Her old shadow and rouge had
run away from her tears.
An amaranth gown hides
the stumps she has for feet.
And the haunting hat hides
where her head and hair do meet.
She'll sit at the sill and
think of nothing at all.
She'll watch the snow die
and watch spring become fall.
She never sleeps?..nor e'er eats
or leaves her puce perch.
The birds they tweet softly
on the neighboring birch.
There once was Monsieur Crow
he was wealthy and cruel.
He was a brute and he snored
and he often would drool.
One day Madame baked some bread
and forgot to add sage.
And then Monsieur Crow
was encumbered with rage.
He took up an axe
and cut off both her arms.
Then lobbed her legs at the knees
Without a smidgen of qualm.
Then so that she'd
always carry his name

He sewed a stuffed crow to her head
o' for shame.

The next morn Monsieur Crow
did not wake with the sun.

His life it did end
as it scarcely begun.

In his bed they did find him
a bloody wet wreck.

His face slashed to bits,
Madame's hands round his neck.

The police they did come
and nothing was found.

For Madame in her bed
was still painfully bound.

But a smile you would see
on Madame's face today.

His fortune now hers
as they saw no foul play.

But Madame she does know
how her husband did die.

She could still feel her arms
though she didn't know why.

The fingers still twitched
and the palms still did grip.

So they crawled, took a knife,
and made Monsieur drip.

When the winters come
Madame is not cold.

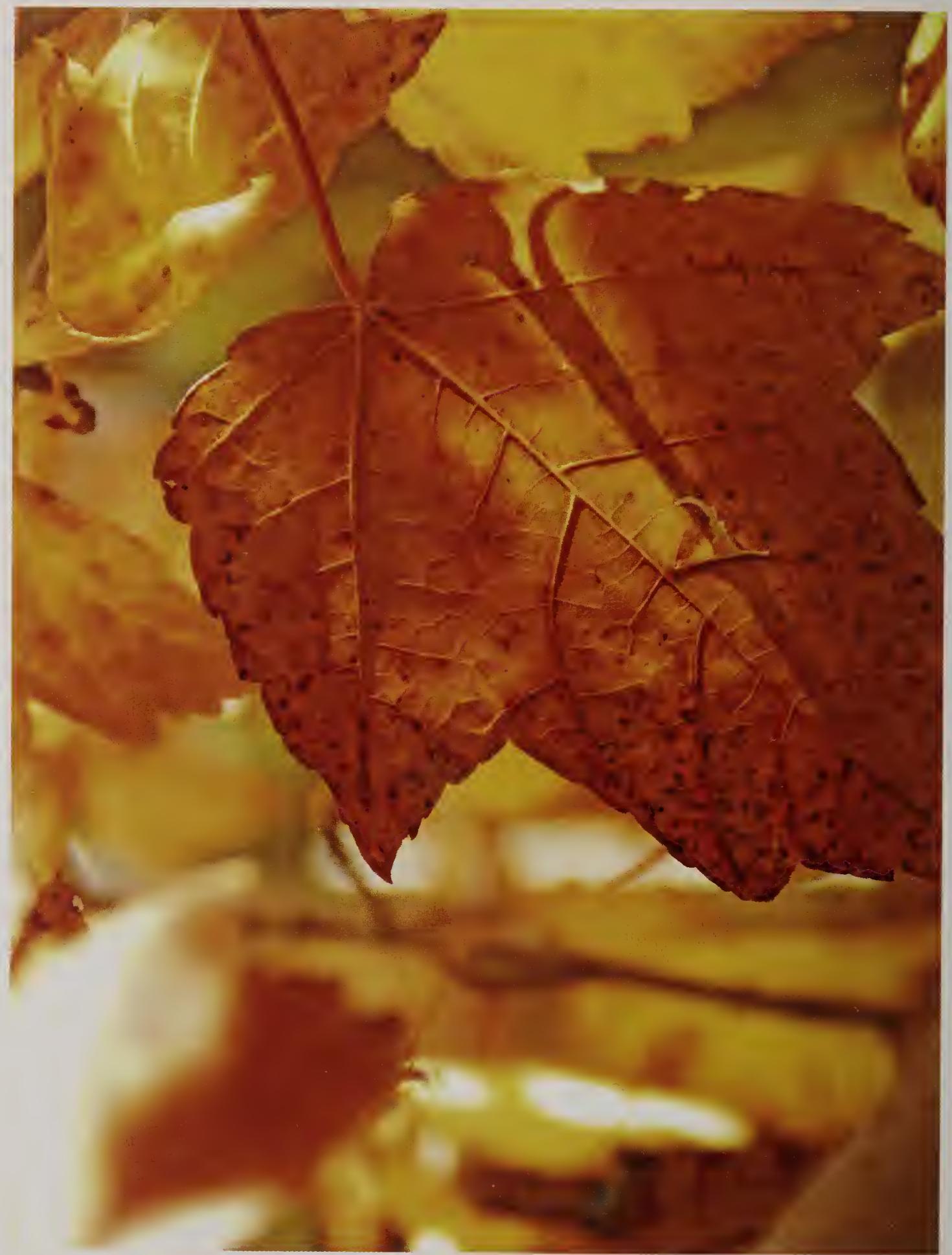
In spring she won't mind
that she's frail and so old.

In summer she'll cherish each breath.
Each winter she'll remember his death.
And as each lonely leaf
to the ground does descend.

She'll remember the stumps
with blood on both ends.

Leaf Me Alone

Jessica Hernandez



Leaves

Jacqueline Bilot

Leaves in the wind,
Whirling as a wave at sea.
Bare of its summer tassels,
Does the tree mind?
Watching the leaves go free.

Bitter wind 'most freezes
Sending cold needles to pierce the bark,
Its tassels would not survive.
Below in many pieces
In white, shadows mark.

A warm gust softens
The harshness of winter.
New tassels peak out of old limbs.
Like the flaxen hair of maidens,
Under leaves, peak flowers.

A hot breeze disturbs the shade;
Leaves wishing for spring's water,
Tassels that adorn the proud branches.
Their green hue made orange as sunshine fades;
A reminder of autumn's splendor.

The Chance Painting

John Borchelt

Ring Ring Ring! Ring Ring! The artist laughed merrily as the phone rang repeatedly. "Why did I even pay the phone bill this month?" He thought aloud as he searched thru his shagged white couch for the last couple bits of his pain-medication he had dropped suddenly as he tried to pack it into his glass pipe, or "devil" pipe as he called it, shaking every step of the way. Cancer had left him a mere shadow of his former self. He had no hair, practically no muscle tissue or teeth; nearly all of his beautiful features had been stolen from him after many grueling months of chemotherapy; however, tonight the physical and emotional pain were simply minor details, for he had a goal in mind; one could more specifically call it a statement, the statement of statements.

"I want some booze," he mumbled with aggravation, but he knew tonight he couldn't. The alcohol would only deter his mission, his masterpiece. Besides, from a "feeling-good" stand-point, alcohol was really no longer needed. The man was in a good place. The drugs he had smoked earlier, which he didn't lose in the couch, were kicking in and he was, at least in a small sense, feeling in control of himself. For him, it was a small success winning against the pain, because there was so much. His partly sunken vessel, which regrettably was his ragged body, was not completely submerged.

While in his pharmaceutically-induced state of peace, the artist reflected on the past as he rode his tongue back and forth across his bare gums, which failed to compliment his pink lipstick. He looked back on his younger days when he was more outgoing and handsome, with his confident and powerful smile. The world he currently knew was so different, he thought; not just in a personal way though, but also within society. In those days people really strived to learn as much as they could and challenged authority. It was before the damn electronics.

"Thank God I'll be dead before those stupid fucking computer glasses come out," he thought almost with genuine happiness. He assumed for sure that people would become zombies to the establishment as they paraded around, shamelessly, in public watching the newest episodes of the "Kardashians" or ungodly awful Miley Cyrus music-videos. "Take me now lord," he pleaded with a somewhat laboriously-encouraged giggle. He also recollects on how, when he was a child, you could play outside almost all night and never have to worry about some weirdo trying to lure you into their van with candy and comic-books. Today,

however, you can't even let your kids out of your sight for two minutes without somebody picking them up and pushing them into prostitution or something insane like that.

The painter decided the whole world had gone mad as he sat on his white shagged couch, still moving his tongue back and forth over his gums' vacant of teeth, carefully trying not to mess up his lipstick, as if he were contemplating an important matter; after all, he did have his own matter to deal with. "Fucking hell of a time to be alive," he mumbled. People don't idolize civil rights heroes anymore; they idolize sex, money, and fame. With a violent stagger that almost took him to the floor, the man got to his feet. He never even bothered to conceal his cock, swinging beneath his undraped powder blue bathrobe. Instead, his hands, which were covered in Band-Aids and track marks from hospital IV's, found minimal labor in the task of retrieving the tools he needed for his project he was about to start. Better now than never, he decided.

The heavily-sedated painter went into his bathroom, which wasn't unlike most other bathrooms in America. There were your typical, and boring, white tiles, white toilet, and a white shower station. The shower, in fact, was what the man was now looking at; more precisely, he was looking at the main porcelain shower wall. He studied it like a nervous boy would study his remarkably attractive girlfriend on prom night. And like a shy boy would probably have trouble making consistent eye contact with his "smoking" hot prom date, the painter had trouble looking at the shower wall. In fact, he squinted. Ever since he started chemotherapy, he had been suffering from extreme light sensitivity issues.

"Fuck this bright ass room!" At least I'm getting ready to paint, he thought with a goofy smile plastered on his face, which made him look like nothing short of a madman. Turning quickly to a (go figure) white stool sitting in a darker corner of the bathroom, he set down his survival kit, which he probably called for a somewhat ironic effect. This shouldn't go too quick, he figured. I haven't had any alcoholic beverages or aspirin for my unforgiving headaches, so my blood shouldn't be too thin. I'll have time to work, he thought gleefully.

He opened up his "survival" kit. In it was a small collection of straight-edged razors and a single paint-brush. The man straightened up in a way that made him look as if he was ten years younger, far from forty-seven, and took on a look that made him look like he was not alone but discussing an issue with an old friend, possibly a friend named Reason or Understanding. After all, he needed some reason to believe his work of art would be justifiable and not in vain. "It's time for the people to know the

world's madness!" he proclaimed aloud in a voice that rained with dignity, a dignity that he had not known for weeks - no months.

He stood in front of the shower wall peering onward with confidence and bravery; in fact, his squinting didn't even appear to be evident anymore. The painter held the presence of a cowboy of the old days, only with loopy ear-rings and heels instead of boots and a bandana, and today, at this very moment, was his moment before the shoot-out. It was his moment to draw. All the madness and the hatred directed towards him had led him to this point; his being casted out for his homosexuality by his family, the unfair medical rates he received because of indecisive politicians, which had caused him to have to sell practically everything in his house, and the disregard of common sense and respect shown by, seemingly, mindless teens who know of, and only love, video games and crappy television had all led him to this day; in fact, some of the same children he spoke of, or "wasteoids" as he called them, even smashed his windows in with rocks and bibles while screaming "die of AIDS faggot!"

The mad painter took a single straight-edged razor and cut his wrist open. Quickly, he splattered blood all over the shower wall, his canvas. He didn't neglect to cover every square inch of the porcelain walls. When he was satisfied with the coating of "human" paint on the shower's surface, he then started to smear colorful phrases in the blood with his fingers such as, "love thy faggot," "help the poor and educate the rich," and "I believe the children will fuck the future." Satisfied that the quotes displayed would serve his cause well when his body was found out of commission, he worked his way back to the white stool to get his paint-brush. By now, every step he took was with extreme effort.

"Doc. Do-do-do-doc, I'm going to need more Band-Aids," he said almost incoherently, and with a narrow but somewhat pleasant smile on his face. With his paint brush in his hands and an unmistakable wheezing in his lungs, the accomplished, award-winning, once rich, and now poverty stricken artist walked back towards his final, disturbing, statement he'd make on earth. He reached up, not without effort, above his painting of madness and colorful phrase and christened it, "The Chance Painting," which to him was the ultimate title for his farewell present to the world and his shitty parents. For the painting, he believed, after its gruesome and radical details hit the morning news, would be the ultimate statement, at least for a single transvestite to make, to open up peoples' eyes to the wrongs and lack of initiative in the world.

He wanted to say, "Yes, hardship pushed me out, but what are you people, the people of the world, going to do to make things better for the "small" people, the desperate people?" He felt his

legs opening up from under him slowly. Death was knocking at his door, and like a kid on Christmas, he welcomed it with open arms; in fact, the painter drew up just enough energy to jump onto the floor with a different kind of laugh; it was the laugh of a child. "Good bye world," he said peacefully. "By all means, change for the better without me." And with those last words of hope, another unique visionary had died, being swallowed by the world.

Golden Gate Bridge

Jessica Hernandez





Elvis

Heather Smith

Addiction

Alexandra Anderson

Filing away, I go.
I am going to make you glamorous.

The feel of cold Django,
All over, painted on thick.

Shiney, smooth nails.
Click, click on my desk.
I feel on top of the world.



Temptation

Lindsey Cantrell

Half-Empty

Danielle Clements

I pour myself a glass of wine
Third glass of the night
I convince myself that I am fine
Although I am shattered into a million pieces
My phone sits silently on the table
Next to my half-empty bottle of Chardonnay
For two days, my phone has sat there losing battery life
As it slowly dies, I die along with it
But then there is a glimmer of hope—
In the form of a text message
You apologize for what you did to me
As I wipe away the sadness from my eyes
You ask me if I am doing okay
I take another sip as I lie to you
You tell me how happy you are with her
But I see the lies between the spaces in your texts
I know that if you were truly happy,
I would not be on your mind tonight
And if I were truly happy,
I would have poured myself another glass by now
Having a celebratory toast
To the couple of the century
But instead, I put the cork in the bottle
And put my glass in the sink
I place my phone on the charger
Hoping that you will text me again
Before I run out of alcohol
And before my hope disappears forever

Time Deflected

Brendon Kolodziej

Welcome to the 21st century.

Make yourself at home with the present day treachery.

Observe the perfidious actions of rival factions,

Arrogant nationalism and delayed reactions.

So I caught the red-eye to Madrid and I arrived in time to dine.

I ate my supper with an elegant Spanish woman and we were having
an excellent night...

That was until she spoke of an incurable doubt.

The room began to spin and the next thing I knew I had blacked out.

Without even a moment to stop and think,

I suppose she had roofied my drink.

In a daze I felt the scrape of red gravel pressing against my cheek

As I awoke on the ground from an involuntary sleep.

And as my eyes adjusted and I came into awareness,

I suddenly realized I was no longer young.

I must have aged 100 years.

My entire life was gone, my youth had faded!

Aeschylus was the father of tragedy–

We must be related.

So what has come over me?

What happened to time?

What has happened to the 21st century?

Where do we draw the line?

Or has it already been drawn and then erased

And now it's gone?

And all of this time deflected,

In my dreadful solitude I am neglected.

With an all-inclusive era come to pass, I awake resurrected.

The 21st century is so outdated

And all its treachery has been deflected.

How did I ever get so lucky?

The Waiting Line

Kris Kemp

Farewell to the boys that waited in line for Pele

After all, was she not worth the wait?

But alas, they could not find bliss within her

She was more a spark of whimsical intrigue

A beauty queen among the barons of suburbia

So Pele's boys welcomed her into another girl's paradise

And all the girls hated her there

Even this was fleeting for Pele

For she has been abnormally attracted to sin

She led a velvet revolution

Though some tried to hold the precious things within her

And she may have seemed like she's your cocaine

She was merely a girl disappearing

There cannot be a sorta fairytale with Pele

So farewell to the boys who have waited in line for Pele

She will become a tear in your hand

And leave you turned like little earthquakes

For she is ever and always

Everybody Else's Girl

Alchemy of the Soul

Andrea Concaildi

Keep away from poison–
Expel it from your life!
Do not pity its toxicity
Or hatred for mankind.
Aspire not to alchemy,
For it will lead to pain.
And none will rise tomorrow
If you kiss bitter lips today.
Poison takes no pity,
And though its smell is sweet,
It will tear the heart right out of you
And claim that it's relief.
Don't be fooled by peacocked guises,
Do not fall for colors bright.
Candle romances are flickering
And tarnish true daylight.
Venom's always vile and
You can't turn coal to gold
So stay away from alchemy
If you want to keep your soul.

Stroke

Patrick J. McCain

My first impression of you, mom, was soft. Your hands eclipsed mine as you walked me through my first steps. I always remember just how surreal it was when our hands traded places. Mine as immense as the sun, yours the fragile moon. Blood rushed at my fingertips, grasping at anything to make a handful of memories of just how smooth your palms were when I walked you through your last steps.

I don't recall holding your hand dad, but I remember shaking it.

Perhaps my favorite touch was when the two of us sat in my room. The blinds were drawn tight, and the television screen cast a pale were-light across the room. I beckoned you over and your diminutive fingertips slipped into mine. Your hands glistened in sweat, but it didn't matter in comparison to really holding the hand of a pretty girl for the first time. My knuckles felt so primitive against the roundness of your cheeks and your lips that swelled towards me like thunderheads. It wasn't until you were gone that I realized how dry my old hands had become. Callouses fortified my palms. The hard white blisters standing testament to the notion that I would never feel anything quite the way I felt your hands.

Pebbles needled my palms after I fell to the pavement. You struck me behind the schoolyard over trading cards.

There's still a pale raised groove in on my knuckles where you spilled your coffee.

...and I'd hoped to hold your hand on New Year's Eve.

The strangest thing, I think, was my willingness to touch the void with you after we had that bad (we'd later on call it good) pot. Its velveteen darkness curled around our fingertips like wispy tendrils of smoke. You remember the night. Mom was working late, and we had a few hours to kill. We high-fived one another and immediately knew we were in way over our heads. The color of your eyes bled out as we laughed and stretched our arms out for miles. You couldn't wait to get away.

For what it's worth – you were the most important touch. My nights were spent sleeping on pale blue tiles and hugging toilets in anticipation of our first meeting. Just the possibility of you reworked me like an atomic bomb turns sand to glass. I remember looking into your eyes for the first time and holding your tiny hand in mine, our molecules mixing together; my DNA reaching out for me. All the while I bit my lips into a trembling smile. You looked up at me with your marble eyes and I asked myself, would you remember me as someone to hold, or a firm, rigid handshake?

The worst is when all that emptiness swelled in my chest; there's a longing, a sensation of falling, then a musty smell that rolls throughout—when I notice the big hand covering the little one on those dead end nights.



Innovation

Leonardo Mireles

Saved

Kelsey L. Kreger

Tie your right shoe and then your left.
Step on the black squares, or I'll make you deaf
Agony I make you feel?
Good, that's the only way I deal.
I'll kill your mother your brother too.
Listen to me or I'll give you the flu.
Here I am stuck in your head.
If you don't listen you'll be dead.

I cry and I cry it won't go away.
How will I ever get through the day?
I touch the doorknob three or four times.
I always walk in perfect straight lines.
I listen and obey I don't want to die.
I can't make it stop, I try and I try.
It's getting stronger every day.
The more I listen...the more I obey.
Can anybody hear me?
It hurts, I can feel its hunger and I can feel its thirst.

What's this I hear, a savior is near?
For once there is warmth no evil is here.
Holding still I accept the Truth.
I feel my soul turning loose.
An angel has come in place of my demon.
My heart is gracious and full of reason.

Insight

Leonardo Mireles

The father got domestic.
The father got arrested.
The mother was expecting,
But no one expected to have yet known the message.
The truth wasn't accepted,
The mother got high to get a different perspective,
Then she got infected,
In the end there was no end,
That's how the kids got neglected.



Gennie's Paradox

Kris Kemp

Who Killed Babs Malone? 2: Lost In New York

Sam T. Jensen

The hunt for the real killer of Babs Malone took me to New York City. After seeing her face everywhere I went in Frankfort, I figured it was best to escape the town where she was brutally murdered. Instead, I went in pursuit of her high-profile friends in the big city. Unfortunately, after so many dead ends, I gave up. So I took up a job as a newspaper reporter and decided to put the case of Babs Malone on hold; that is, until a story I was investigating turned out to be much more than a chicken pox breakout at a local elementary school.

It was 3:15 in the afternoon at the Little Apple School for the Overweight. I parked my Royal Deluxe II in the handicapped parking area and proceeded to walk inside with a slight limp. Kelly Kemper's kindergarten class was quietly coloring with crayons. "Cool!" I quickly cried as I saw Sarah Stein's sea foam seahorse eating seaweed in the Salton Sea. "There's only one problem, Sarah," I exclaimed, "Seahorses don't live in the Salton Sea." Before I could make Sarah cry, class was let out.

I stayed behind to talk to Ms. Kemper. "I understand chicken pox has become quite a problem around here." I said in a dull, non-caring tone. Kemper explained numerous parents had been calling their children in, stating they have chicken pox. "Well, if there's one thing this newspaper reporter and small down detective knows, it's to never trust parents. Also, ducks are a great going away present." After a brief stop at New York's famous downtown hotspot, McDonald's, I contacted the parents of one Danny Boyle, a student famous for his burping abilities and lack of coherent thoughts.

Danny's father was hesitant to meet with me, giving the impression he had something to hide. So I called him back in a disguise and told him I was with Publisher's Clearing House and he had just won \$100,000. I had to take up some odd jobs to collect the money, but once I got it, I went over to the Boyle residence to confront him.

"What's this about?!" Mr. Boyle shouted. "You don't believe my kid is sick? I don't know what kind of mind games you're playing, Smith, but my son is upstairs taking an oatmeal bath right now. And for Christ's sake, lose the moustache! I didn't even know what you looked like before you put it on!" I could tell this wasn't going

to be easy. So I did what any reasonable man would do in my situation. I put on a different moustache.

As the list of children grew smaller, my hopes began to dwindle. Until I saw the last name on the list: Goober Callahan. I laughed so hard at his name I snorted up my McFlurry from earlier. But Goober was my final resort. Goober lived in the Motel 5 with his Uncle Ray. Uncle Ray was your typical scruffy bearded, stained white T, denim cut-off kind of guy. With half a can of Coke in his left hand, he showed me inside.

"Nice place you got here, Ray." I couldn't have said it more sarcastically. "You got your bed, mini-fridge, a toilet with no toilet seat, six mousetraps, four full, you got your wallpaper fresh out of 1978, a bathtub with a mysterious purple stain around it, you got your -" before I could list the empty Doritos bag in the sink, Goober popped his head up from his bed. He was sick as a dog. His face was redder than a cartoon hot dog. I left the motel with no leads and a stupid story about chicken pox.

But then, as I was walking back to the bus stop, the cleaning woman stopped me. "Aren't you Harry Smith?!" she exclaimed with an excitable bounce in her voice. Before I could say "Yes, and who might you be, you beautiful set of legs?" I saw it in her eyes. This wasn't just another daydream. This was real. This was Babs Malone. Her hair was different, she wore glasses, and she had a tattoo of a seahorse on her wrist; but this was her, without a shadow of a doubt.

"You never helped me." Her excitement turned to anger. "I had to fake my own death to get out of that town. Now I'm afraid he's found me again." As she continued berating me, I couldn't help but imagine her and I being shrunk down to a miniature size and riding on a seahorse together, her arms squeezing me tight as we ride the cerulean waves. "Oh look, a starfish!" I would scream, as our hearts beat faster for each other with each second that passed.

"Harry, do you think you could do that for me?" Babs asked. "Of course, but you're going to need to bring a second pair of goggles. I sold mine," I responded. "I thought you might say that," she said, "so I wrote down everything I just said. Please help me. I don't want to kill another homeless look-alike." Just like that, ole' Harry "The Hound Dog" Smith was back in business.

Like Bing Crosby always said, "Even if she's been dead for two years, you've still got a chance." I encouraged Babs to stay with me for the night, so I could keep an eye on her. Whoever was out to get her could be watching her every move. It was best that a

strong, tough, masculine man was there to make sure she was safe. But I couldn't find anyone like that, so I took it upon myself to look after her.

Since I sold my apartment, we took refuge under the Subway. The sweet smells of freshly baked bread put Babs Malone straight to sleep. But I was too busy trying to decipher her note. I was too embarrassed to tell her I was completely illiterate, so I went back to the Little Apple to see if my friend, Ms. Kemper, could help me. I knocked quietly on the classroom door. She answered the door with a nightcap and a teddy bear under her arm.

"What is it?" she yawned. "First of all, Ms. Kemper," I began, "I would like to start by telling you that I knew all teachers lived in their classrooms. Secondly, what's this word?" I showed her the paper. She put on her reading glasses and looked the note over. Her face was in shock. "Mr. Smith, how much about Miss Malone do you know?" she pondered. "She's about five-foot four, black hair, formerly blonde. She likes seahorses and wears dark red lipstick." I answered extremely confidently, hoping she would give me an A+.

Kemper explained there was much more to Ms. Malone than I thought. Her jealous ex-boyfriend had been trying to kill her. She had been on the run from him for six years. She saw him three weeks ago in a coffee house; he didn't recognize her. But she was afraid if there was one false move, she could lose her life. I didn't get my A+ but I did get an idea. "Thank you for your help, Ms. Kemper." I applauded her gracious act. "I'll let you go back to crying into your rocky road as you watch reruns of Facts of Life and call your ex-boyfriends asking why they left you," I continued. "I'll give you a hint, it's your personality and face combination."

The guys always worked late when we had to make a deadline for the newspaper. I strolled in feeling confident I had the biggest story of the millennium, or decade, whichever is bigger. "Dennis!" I shouted to the editor in chief, "I have the biggest story of the millennium, or decade, whichever is bigger." I told him all the details, how I knew Babs faked her own death and I knew she was working as a cleaning woman in New York, and how it only took me two and a half years to track her down. "No kidding," Dennis quietly muttered, "you know, I used to date her a while back." "Sure you did, pal," I scoffed. "Even if you did, you wouldn't recognize her now. She cut her hair, dyed it black, threw on a pair of glasses, and lives under the Subway at 38th and Broadway."

As I continued laughing at Dennis' blatant lie, he exited the

building to go home. I am sure he was just self-conscious about lying to me that he was dating an up and coming actress. But it was then I had a startling revelation. If Babs was still under the Subway and Dennis wasn't here, I had no one to type my story. I walked back to the Subway, my feet black with the dirt and grime of the inner city, because I sold my shoes and socks.

I noticed Babs' scared face. Dennis stood behind her, holding a gun. "Babs, don't be rude, say hello to Dennis. He's a friend of mine from work." "Harry," Babs explained, "I know who this is." It took me twenty five uncomfortable minutes, but I finally connected the dots on the back of the Subway menu – "it's a sandwich!" I screamed with joy. "As for you, Dennis, I'm afraid I can't muster the sight of you any longer. You've been hamming it up enough. Let's break the bread. I apologize if these puns are too cheesy."

"Harry, I have to kill her. Can't you see? If I can't have her, no one can." Dennis stated. "You raise a good point–hey, is that the Eifel Tower?" I distracted Dennis long enough to come up with a plan to get Babs safe. "I don't see anything, Harry, now if you don't mind, I really need to get this anger out of me." "Go ahead," I replied, "but I don't see what shooting an Italian man would do." "What?" Dennis turned Babs around, and to his surprise all he saw was a friendly Italian man with a fluffy moustache and no glasses.

Ashamed and embarrassed, Dennis dropped his gun and ran home. "I think we're safe," I said as I removed the fake moustache from Babs' beautiful lavender skin, "at least for now." I finally got to kiss those rose-colored lips that used to follow me in my dreams. My whole body floated in the air and the pupils in my eyes turned into little hearts, just like my Pa always said would happen when I met the love of my life. But this isn't a love story. It's still a mystery. No one knows where the chicken pox came from, I'm still not sure how I raised \$100,000 in four days, and I have absolutely no idea why the most perfect woman in the world chose a small town detective to marry and spend the rest of her life with.



Workday's End

Hudson Ambrose

There is All Sorts Of

L J

There is all sorts of shit in my glass.
At the end, at the bottom, at last glance
THERE
clusters and crumbs of debris. YEEK.

All sorts of shit in my glass
hanging around trying to kill me.
I sip around it, but I can't down it.

I'm mid-century as they label it now --
like we are the only century worthy of this
title! All sort of shit in my glass -- my ass!

I sit on a couch, as if that is significant, across
from the counselor who pulled an abuse out her hat
-- DECADES ago -- and here I am AGAIN.

In desperation, I call.
My older sister. I, second born, have ignored all others --
while being jealous all the while of all others.
GOD HOW DID THIS SHIT GET IN MY GLASS?

"She didn't start drinking until I left," says she.
Great. That's just great -- you were the charm of true love.
AND OUR LIVES WERE FUCKED WHEN YOU
broke the illusion -- and LEFT ALL THIS SHIT IN MY GLASS!

I cry.
"Are you still there?" she asks.
"Yeah, thanks," I murmur.

This is her story. What's mine? And theirs (the toddlers)?
Damn this shit in my glass: it's not the vodka, or the Kailua--
but maybe it's the Irish Cream. She is always bringing up the Irish!

Wordeater #129 & Fall '13 E-Zine Awards

Poetry

Brendon Kolodziej
Andrea Concaildi
Elizabeth Chatman
Danielle Clements
Kris Kemp
Daniel Kloc
Kelsey L. Kreger
Stephanie Ly
Alexandria Miller
Renee Stone

The John Stobart Award for Poetry was established in honor of the founder and guiding light of Wordeater. He retired from JJC's English/World Languages Department in 1999 having sponsored 106 issues.

Nerves¹
Alchemy of the Soul²
Word Bruises^{*}
Half-Empty^{*}
The Waiting Line^{*}
Heroes^{*}
Saved^{*}
Heart in Peace^{*}
Inner Beauty^{*}
Bubonic^{*}

Prose

Linda Joanne
Kevin Sterne

Train of Thought^{*}
Medicine Hands^{*}

Visual Arts

Lindsey Cantrell
Jessica Hernandez
Renee Stone
Caroline Taylor

Secrets
Golden Gate Bridge
Cage
Wild Spring Iris

1, 2, * = First Choice, Second Choice,
Honorable Mention

Jurors

Literature:

John Stobart, Wordeater Founder
Professor, English/World Languages (retired)

Visual Arts:

Gisele Atterberry
Professor, Fine Arts



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www.wordeater.org

See & hear the multimedia Fall '13 E-Zine

Submission Guidelines

Wordeater is always accepting submissions for its next print and e-zine issues. Wordeater is published in May and December.

Wordeater accepts poetry, prose fiction, creative nonfiction, essays, reviews, visual art, photography, comics, music, spoken word recordings, short films, and other multi-media for publication consideration.

All written work must be word-processed in Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) and submitted through www.wordeater.org-Submit.

All multimedia must be submitted in appropriate formats either through wordeater.org or CD/DVD to Adam Heidenreich (C-1063).

All work must be original and unpublished. Artists retain all rights to their own work and may publish it in other media.

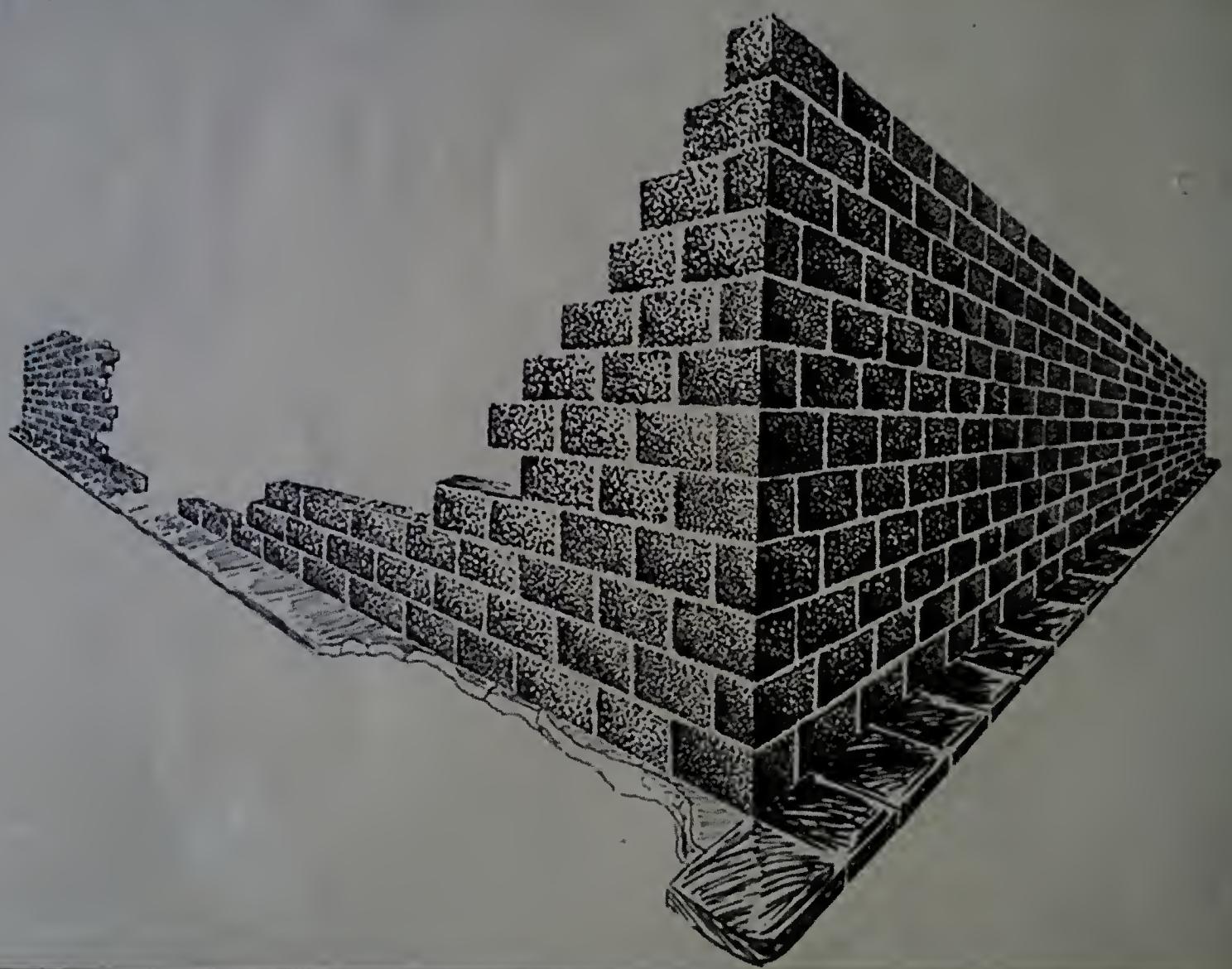
Submissions may include a brief "About the Artist" biography (50 words or less), a digital photo, and a link to a web page for promotional purposes. This content will be included if the work is chosen for the e-zine.

Please use the online submission form and accurately provide all contact info. Please identify yourself as a current student, alumni, or a present or former faculty or staff member. Works will be judged anonymously by the student Editorial Board. There is no limit on the number of submissions, but it is suggested artists submit only a representative collection of no more than six entries for a single issue.

Except for original artwork, submissions will not be returned.

Editorial changes may be made for readability and presentation.

All work must be submitted through wordeater.org or sent to Adam J. Heidenreich, Associate Professor of English, Wordeater Advisor (C-1063), in appropriate digital format (CD or DVD) or with instructions for scanning or digital photography.



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